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LETTER DATED 7 APRIL 1997 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE LIBYAN ARAB JAMAHIRIYA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to refer to the statement made by the President of the Security Council on 4 April 1997 (S/PRST/1997/18) concerning the flight made by an aircraft of Libyan Arab Airlines taking Libyan pilgrims to the Holy Places.

I should like to reaffirm the following points, which I made at my meeting with you and to a number of the members of the Security Council and which represent my country's position on this question:

1. My country conveys its deep concern and regret that such a statement should have been adopted by the Security Council. We would have expected the Council to be more perceptive in addressing religious issues that concern a person's faith and his relationship with his God in view of the sanctity of the direct relationship between a Muslim and his God when Muslims gather together and because of the political repercussions of encroaching upon this relationship.

2. The Pilgrimage is a religious duty for all Muslims, as is explicitly stipulated in the Holy Koran. Its performance and the choice of a means of reaching the Holy Places is one of the rights of a Muslim on which there are no religious restrictions and with respect to which he does not require anyone's intercession or permission.

3. In this context, that an aircraft of Libyan Arab Airlines should proceed to the Pilgrimage is a purely religious matter. The Council should not have considered it otherwise and should not have given it a political dimension. It was not, after all, a tourist flight or a commercial flight.

4. In addition to the purely religious matters indicated above and in the light of the economic restrictions imposed on the country and of which everyone is aware, in particular the restrictions on the movement of its funds, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya is unable to lease aircraft from other companies for the carriage of pilgrims. It is thus obliged to transport pilgrims by whatever means of aerial transport are available to it.

5. Taking account of all the foregoing, we are of the view that the Security Council should refrain from interfering in this sensitive religious matter out of respect for the right of Muslims to perform their rites and in order to avoid the complications that might ensue from provoking the sentiments not only of Muslims in my country but also of Muslims in general. Our region in particular, over and above what is already known of it, continues to be fraught with the unpredictable consequences of such complications.

I should be most grateful if you would have this letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Abuzed O. DORDA
Permanent Representative